

ASSESSING CPEC: EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, POSITIVITY AND NEGATIVITY IN CONTEXT OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

Dr. Muhammad Tahir Rashid * Dr. Nargis Abbas & Dr.
Uzma Ashiq*****

Abstract

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is considered a mega project for the regional connectivity with a potential to be a game changer for the entire region. CPEC is a multi-billion project, reserved for the energy and infrastructure respectively. This paper investigates the impact of CPEC on socio economic development in Pakistan through the years. The most significant impact has been observed in the employment sector. Due to this project, 30,000 jobs will be provided to young unemployed professionals. In addition, transportation costs will be minimized and Infrastructure will also be improved by constructing motorway between Lahore and Karachi. Moreover, important impact of CPEC is to resolve the power shortage. Along these positive aspects, CPEC also has some negative impacts like, the risk of higher income disparity not only in Pakistan but also between the China and Pakistan. The reason behind this is the tax exemption on Chinese. Secondly, due to capital flight, trade deficit will increase. In the light of above discussion, it is suggested that Pakistan have to wake up and work for their own interests, and cultivate the required skills and compound talents in the Pakistani youth in higher education institutions to increase their employability in Chinese companies.

Keywords: CPEC, Employment, Regional cooperation, Higher Education.

*Assistant Professor, Sciences & Humanities, FAST NUCES, Lahore E-Mail: tahir.rashid@nu.edu.pk

**Assistant Professor, Department of Education. University of Sargodha, Sargodha. E-Mail: nargis.abbas@uos.edu.pk

***Professor, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Lahore. E-Mail: uzma.dsw@pu.edu.pk

Introduction

During the most recent 15 years, Indo-China relations have additionally kept on developing particularly after September 11, 2001, psychological oppressor assaults and their collaboration upgraded in a few key regions, for instance the foundation of the Asian Investment Program, however, the worries like military and boundary debates stayed the primary obstacle in local setting. Conversely, the respective relations among Pakistan and China are ceaselessly congregating on one plan point, the reinforcing of their essential relationship, which is turning into a main issue of India. Internationally, India is destroying a story that these creating Pak-China ties are pointed toward confining Indian military, while jeopardizing the U.S. interests in Asia-Pacific region. In spite of further developing ties among China and India, Islamabad partners may not be uncertain on the grounds that Indo-China regional debates and monetary contention have twisted the conventional setting of their relations and these two rising economies are testing each other looking for territorial and worldwide matchless quality.

The “China Pakistan Economic Corridor” known by its popular acronym CPEC is like a needle in a haystack of the “One-Belt One-Road” Mega Project of China. The “One-Belt One-Road” is an estimated USD 4 trillion master plan by China which seeks to establish itself as global economic leader with a significant influence in the South Asian region. Billions of dollars have been invested in numerous South Asian States namely “Pakistan”, “Nepal”, “Sri Lanka”, “Bangladesh”, and “Afghanistan” to develop essential and rudimentary infrastructure. While being important for China’s national defence, it also provides an added advantage for its trade regime globally (Qamar, 2017).

The Economic Corridor is a grand scheme for regional connectivity. Evidently, it will potentially increase China’s sphere of influence and tighten ties with its trading and regional neighbours. The “One-Belt One-Road” (OBOR) includes different projects related to development of roads and railway networks in order to connect countries.

CPEC will benefit on “Iran”, “India”, “Afghanistan”, and Central Asian Republic, in addition to the direct beneficiaries i.e. “China” and “Pakistan”. By enabling easier and frequent movement with the help the enhancement and improvement of railway, highways and aviation transportation structures, it has the potential to boost the exchange of knowledge between people from different regions in

sectors including academics, trade and culture. It will also incentivize the energy sectors to have introduce better policies and embrace greater cooperation for optimal growth (CPEC, 2017).

CPEC is expectedly going to turn tables in Pakistan's favour. The amount of foreign direct investment is expected to exceed all previous records of such investments in Pakistan over the past several years. It is substantially greater than foreign assistance received by Pakistan from the US since 2001 (Ali S. M., 2015). According to Rana (2017), the figure for U.S AID stands at about USD 33.4 Billion combining both Military and economic assistance since 9/11 while CPEC is estimated to be 62 Billion \$. Thus, it effectively puts all past U.S assistance and endowment on Pakistan in the shadow of CPEC.

For China, "CPEC" effectively reduce the 12000 kilometre long "Malacca" route from Middle East must travel to reach the China (Massarrat & Ashfaq, 2015). It is an Achilles's Heel (critical vulnerability) for China that roughly eighty-five percent of oil imports have to move through the Strait of "Malacca" (Markey & West, 2016). Thus, shortening the distance between countries and ensuring cooperation.

This whole project will work for the betterment of Pakistan and China because it will not only improve the infrastructure but also has potential impact on social development of Pakistan. The prime focus of this whole initiative was to improve the standards of living among the population in Pakistan as well as in China (Tehsin et al., 2017). However, it is also a fact that there are always pros and cons of every initiative. Therefore, the objective of this study was to analyse the potential impacts, both positive and negative, of CPEC on socio-economic progress and employment opportunities in the context of regional cooperation of Pakistan and China.

Pak-China Geo-Economic Partnership and Gwadar Port

Having not the landlocked state along with the warm waters is the plus point for Pakistan's coastal area which enhances its strategic importance not only for the regional but the greater powers as well. It's the connecting point for two sub regions of Asian continent which are South Asia and Central Asia.

Though the New Delhi likewise have monetary advantages connected with Gwadar port since it is a more limited way among India and West Asia. Furthermore, all things considered, Sino-Persian – Gulf Trade - routes represent 60% of all China's imperativeness necessities. This port can help China both monetarily and militarily.

Apparently, Gwadar port is a suitable choice for isolated Afghanistan, by far most of Central Asian states and bits of Russia throughout the cold weather conditions when the said states ports are closed. In this way Gwadar assumes a critical part in regional connectivity. In the changing regional geopolitical situation, China, the world's biggest and quickest developing economy as far as buying power, will have its effects on Gwadar's forthcoming position. Pakistan and particularly Baluchistan will benefit from Chinese imports and trade. Because of this port, Pakistan might turn into a world forerunner in petro-manufactured business, and its monetary improvement would be extraordinarily helped.

CPEC Power Projects: End of a Dark Era

Pakistan and China will cooperate on power projects to provide 16,400 megawatts of electricity in the coming years (China Daily, 2015). Thus, putting an end to the black period, Pakistan had to face for more than a decade now. Some famous projects are Coal Fired Power Plants in Port Qasim, Sahiwal and Gwadar. Other examples include the Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park Bhawalpur, and Engro Thar Power Plant.

Railway Projects

Pakistan Railway has seen enough years of humiliation and mockery for its lack of quality and speed service. With CPEC, the Railway system of Pakistan is going to see some new additions to its capacity that will make it comparable to any world class counterparts (CPEC, 2013)

The additions include a high-speed railway track of 1600Km from Peshawar to Karachi. Construction of Peshawar to Torkham railway network will also be done. A 1059Km long railway connecting Havelian in Pakistan to Kashi in China will be built. New Railway line 1328Km long will be established linking Gwadar to Quetta via Besima and a station in Jacobabad at a cost of 4.5Billion USD investment. Taftan Quetta Railway line will be reconstructed and upgraded under the CPEC program. This will make travel time shorter safer and more economical for passengers as well as freight that has to travel through large trucks and containers on roads. This will also reduce traffic on roads of larger sized commercial vehicles in the process.

China-Pakistan Higher Education

It is well established fact that Education and economy goes hand in hand. Therefore, to sustain the common goal of CPEC, both Pakistan and China initiated the consortium of universities. Initially the CPEC consortium of 19 universities, 10 universities of Pakistan and 9 universities of China, was started in 2017 which is now expanded to 110 universities (Xinhua, 2022). The major purpose for this consortium was to carry research in Science & Technology, Industrial & Agricultural and Educational sciences including Curriculum Designing; Instructional Content and Assessment Methodologies; Teaching Reform and Talents Training at higher education level to promote the mutual benefit and to create the employment opportunities for Pakistani youth (CPECinfo, 2021). Taking this academic collaboration to the next level, China Study Centers have been established in various public sector universities across the Pakistan which are aimed at Chinese language training, cultural activities, conferences, workshops etc.

Results and Discussion

As in the previous sections the importance of CPEC have been discussed. Now the main objective of this section is to highlight the positive and negative impacts of CPEC on regional cooperation as well as socio economic progress of Pakistan under CPEC.

Positive Aspects

The Strategic Ties of Pakistan and China

The relations of Pakistan and China is followed back to 1950 while Pakistan turned into the third non-communist nation and first Muslim country to recognise China after its foundation. During the long 65 years of heartfelt companionship among Pakistan and China, the two nations have encountered and adapted to fluctuated situations and kept up with their ties effectively. The historical backdrop of their bond is composed with the participation in each conceivable field for example security, nuclear technology, society and culture, and economy. The monetary collaboration between the two nations has been working on reliably throughout the long term; in spite of global slowdown, the trade between the two nations has been expanding, and has ended up being an extremely reverberant strategic partnership.

CPEC: Priceless asset for Pakistan

The significance of CPEC lies in the prime geo-key area of deep-sea Gwadar Port lying at the edge of Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz which is world energy jugular. When the project will be matured, Pakistan can go about as a door of exchange to all landlocked Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan and even Russia. CPEC will have numerous Extraordinary Economic Zones on its way from Gwadar to Kashghar. This mega project will change Pakistan into a trade route door for South Asian region and gateway with rest of the world. Pakistan required a more reliable vital accomplice in the region directly following developing Indo-US ties. Indo-US ties somewhat recently had placed Pakistan out of the situation in the region. Additionally, heating up of relations among Pakistan and Russia as an afterthought line of CPEC project brings about future prospects of China-Pakistan Russia hub to counter Indo-US understanding in the region. China's financial and military help will help Pakistan generally and it is sure that Pakistan's objective of equality with India will turn out to be effectively feasible. It would unquestionably assist the country with managing a portion of its major formative issues, such as conquering its energy deficiency essentially and updating a portion of its separated framework.

Positive Impact on Regional Cooperation

CPEC is expected to greatly reduce the 12,000-kilometre route which Middle Eastern oil had to travel to reach the Chinese ports (Massarrat & Ashfaq, 2015). The new route will provide an alternative to China for the oil supplies of about 7 Million Barrels per day rather than through the straits of Malacca (Ashraf, 2015). The distance for oil supplies will be about 3000 Km through the CPEC route compared to over 12000 Km. saving transport and freight costs.

In addition to this, with the completion of the Gwadar Kashgar pipeline about 17% of oil imports by China will go through Pakistan (Yousafzai, 2016).

Second, it could even help Pakistan gain a bargaining chip with hostile Western Nations such as U.S. because it has reduced Pakistan's dependency on U.S. for the much badly needed fund in the current scenario. A Wall Street Journal article by Stephen Bret can assure the people that China as an alternative source of funds is better than US and other Western backed funds like IMF and World Bank.

In the article, suggested that in exchange for USD100 Billion dollar all of Pakistan's nuclear assets be removed by western Democracies (Stephen, 2008).

Employment Opportunities

First, this could actually boost the Pakistan's economy and provide jobs desperately the current government wants to provide to the young unemployed workforce of the country. Already about 30,000 jobs have been created by the CPEC. As seen that 27 export processing zones have been created throughout Pakistan through CPEC. So a massive rise in employment will take place. Some estimates put the jobs created by CPEC at about 7 hundred thousand to a more optimistic estimate of 2.32 million jobs by the Pakistani Government (Arifeen, 2017).

Youth will be put to good use rather than wasteful activities while at the same time removing poverty and crime resulting from poverty. These jobs will help develop skills in the Pakistani population which is the fifth youngest in the world and also facing stress from being unproductive and uncertain about their future (Ali & Hafeez, 2017; Abbas & Ashiq, 2017).

Relief from Power Shortage

Private Companies have been tasked with building the energy infrastructure with projects worth USD33 billion. This will assist in the elimination of power problems in Pakistan. The usual shortfall is 4,500 MW. It is estimated that due to this energy crisis 2-2.5%, Pakistan's GDP per annum is low. Between 2018 and 2020 energy projects generating more than 10,400 MW of electricity will be developed under CPEC "Early Harvest" projects (Nasir, 2016).

Infrastructure Projects

There are infrastructure projects of about approximately USD11 billion. Plans includes construction of a 1,100 km long motorway between Pakistani cities of "Karachi" and "Lahore". The "Karakoram Highway" linking "China" and "Rawalpindi" will be rebuilt and overhauled. The upgrade of the Karachi-Peshawar Railway Track is also scheduled to be completed in order to support plans of the launch high speed trains that travel 160 km per hour. The railway network of Pakistan will also link up with "Xinjiang" Railway in "Kashgar" in South China. As a part of CPEC, different pipeline networks will also be laid to facilitate the transportation of liquefied-natural-gas (LNG) and oil. It also includes a USD2.5 billion pipeline to transport gas from Iran between Gwadar and Nawabshah (Nasir, 2016).

Gateway for Central Asian Countries

With the help of CPEC, China can import oil from Middle East via a new route. It will require the oil shipments from Middle East to be unloaded at the Gwadar seaport and transferred to China via road, thus reducing the current distance of 12,000 km journey to 2,395 km. This will act as a channel for the new “Maritime Silk Route” that is perceived to connect three billion people from Africa, Asia and Europe. Once Gwadar is fully operational, it serves as a global gateway to different countries in the Central Asian region or other landlocked countries including “Afghanistan”, “Uzbekistan”. It will also help linking “Iran” and “Sri Lanka” with “Xinjiang” Province of China (Nasir, 2016).

Growth in Fruits’ Exports

Baltistan is famous for the exports of fresh fruit like apricots, cherries and apples. The local traders can increase their sales and ultimately profits by saving transportation cost. Currently, fruits are exported via Dubai by air. A faster and cheaper route road via Xinjiang to China can be used after the completion of CPEC (Nasir, 2016).

Inter-racial Harmony and Social Integration

With the CPEC comes the Chinese in great numbers into Pakistan. The number of Chinese stand at over 30,000 strong working on different projects related to CPEC (Associated Press of Pakistan, 2017). This shows that the sharing of the culture between the two nations could be imminent. Some of the future implications could be the interracial harmony and social integration of Chinese into Pakistani culture and vice versa. This could include food, clothing, and lifestyle through possibly marriages between the two nation’s people.

Tourism Development

In Pakistan, tourism currently earns a little part of our GDP and is believed to be raised due to this corridor. It will also promote the tourism in the seventy-three thousand sq. km territory which is declared to be a mountaineer’s paradise, as there more than fifty mountains having height of 7,000 meters or more. The Nanga Parbat and K2, world’s second highest peak also resides in Pakistan. K2 is situated on the border region between “Baltistan” and the “Taxkorgan” Tajik Autonomous County of “Xinjiang” (Nasir, 2016).

Travelling Facilities

With the construction of new railway and motorway routes through the CPEC, Pakistani citizens can get the best pleasure and have the most enjoyable time travelling throughout the country. Furthermore, this upgradation will reduce the travel time and cost in transporting people and freight alike through the use of high speed railway systems constructed under the CPEC.

Negative Aspects

At “Chabahar”, an Iranian port city barely a 100 nautical miles away from Gwadar, the Indian government is developing a small multipurpose port with the aim of connecting India to Central Asia. It will give Indian companies faster access to the Central Asian region. This project is considered to be a competition for the Gwadar port of Pakistan and an Indian strategy to counterbalance to ever-growing Chinese influence in South Asia region. For the construction of two berths for containers and other cargo, India is investing USD 85 million whereas a grand sum USD 500 million has been scheduled to be allocated by India for the complete development of the “Chabahar Port” (Dawn, 2016). This shows that the regional cooperation has been turned into regional competition at best. An intense rivalry has started with countries that refuse to accept Chinese sphere of influence such as India and Iran.

Locals Pay Your Taxes- No Tax on Foreigners

A Chinese state-owned firm, “China Overseas Port Holding Company”, has been given a forty-year lease for the strategic Port of “Gwadar”. The lessee has been involved the infrastructure development of the Gwadar port since 2013. Under its new long-term contract, the firm will have over 90 percent of share in revenue from Gwadar’s marine operations and 85 percent share in the revenue from the management of the adjacent free zone. Moreover, the tax exemptions granted by Pakistani government to the Chinese companies working on CPEC-related projects, provides them added benefits (Maritime Executive, 2017). This very imbalanced share of revenue in favour of Chinese companies goes to show that Pakistani’s

may turn slave in their own country and Chinese may not be thinking of a win-win situation ruling class in Pakistan is seeing.

The Pakistani government in a bid to please the Chinese companies has indulged in unequal treatment to Pakistani nation. On one hand it is said that very small no. of Pakistani's pay income and other direct taxes while on the other hand Chinese companies are endowed with tax exemptions on a massive scale amounting to about Rs 33 Billion in Tax benefits in a single year for the Chinese companies (Karamat, 2017).

Furthermore, at least Rs.150 Billion government revenue was lost to these exemptions under the Statutory Regulatory Orders (Karamat, 2017). This goes to show a step mother attitude of the state towards its own people. Meaning income disparities will only increase under such one-sided concessions by the government.

With the concessions, there is a risk to the local manufacturing sector which is already uncompetitive and will be significantly damaged if the Chinese goods would enter the local market. The net jobs created might be less due to local businesses going bankrupt due to intense competition.

Chinese Coal: A Potential Source of Trade Deficit

The power plants that are being built will run mostly on foreign fuel and their ownership is mostly in Chinese hands so capital flight of profits could be more than the development that will come after the completion of the CPEC and other independent power plants.

The trade deficit might increase even further now that the country has to make payments for burning imported Chinese coal as what happened during the last government of PPP resulting in circular debt and increase in import bill.

The use of imported coal instead of Thar coal discovered in 1992 shows that local coal is not being exploited even after 25 years of their discovery and even when Pakistan is ever weaker economically due to foreign debts and trade deficit. Thar coal reserves stand at about 175 Billion Metric Tons (Geological Survey of Pakistan, 2012).

Curse of Loan; Not a Gift

Investments are done with the point of view of making profits, so it would be foolish to think that any foreign investment is a gift.

They will sooner or later start taking the profits back to their own country resulting in Pakistani nation getting poorer as a result. So, caution should be ensured in allowing foreign investments as is the case with CPEC. From one estimate, Pakistan may have to pay about \$90 billion in as repayment in the next thirty years for \$50 billion CPEC loans and yearly repayments of \$ 3.7 billion per annum (Siddiqui, Pakistan will be paying China \$90b against CPEC-related projects, 2017).

If Pakistan is not able to pay back these loans, then a situation similar to Sri Lanka may occur here as well. Debt trap occurred in Sri Lanka when it was no longer able to pay back the foreign debt. Result was that it had to sell 70% stake in its USD1.3 billion, Chinese-built deep-sea Hambantota port for USD1.1Billion back to the Chinese to pay debt servicing for the total of USD65 Billion total debt of Sri Lanka (Kazmin, 2017). This is a direct blow to the sovereignty of a country. The same situation could be faced by Pakistan with Gwadar Port. Since the investment is done in the form of Loans and equity stake by the Chinese, not a gift as being portrayed in media.

Controversy of Route

There has been controversy on the route of the CPEC since Eastern route is being given priority where the most land is expected to be lost at 10,322,000 hectares area under cultivation with 30,928 thousand tonnes of major crop production compared to 5,829,000 hectares of area under cultivation and 13,754 thousand tonnes production of major crops in the central route and 2,933,000 hectares area under cultivation and 7,430 thousand tonnes for western route. This shows that massive amount of forced land acquisitions will be done and by the government and people moved from their homes and lands might demand higher dislocation and compensations (Bengali, 2015). Thus, it can make CPEC a game changer for the hardworking rural class by turning them into landless farmers.

Table 1

Comparative Cost of the Three Routes

	“Central Route”	“Eastern Route”	“Western Route”
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Ave. Population Density	156	264	98
Total Area of Cultivation (000 Ha)	5,829	10,322	2,933
Production of 4 Major crops (000s Tonnes)	13,754	30,928	7,430

Source: (Bengali, 2015)

Natives Slave in their Own Land

The people might get jobs but they will be working for foreign people in their own country. A parallel example would be of the East India Trading Company that was able to usurp power under the guise of traders. Here the scenario is similar since the Pakistan Army has been given the task of protecting Chinese workers who might later turn on our same people against us. A 12,000 strong division was created by the Pakistan Army to protect CPEC interests (Hali, 2017). Similarly, 32,000 have been employed for security of Chinese involved in CPEC projects (Hali, 2017). These fears may be an important concern for the well-being of all common Pakistanis. This VIP treatment may lead to wrong precedence and may turn Chinese into Elites.

Similarly, there are speculations of China interested in building military bases in Pakistan. This could be a sovereignty issue for the country as well as cause of concern for normal people as China may try to rig the system from within as well as pressurize the governments of the future with the military that may be stationed inside Pakistan. According to The Guardian News Agency, Pentagon released has released a report in which it has been speculated that Pakistan will be a country of choice for China to build military bases (The Guardian, 2017).

Labour and Environmental Problems

The people of Pakistan may get handsome employment opportunities in the export processing zones mentioned earlier during the introduction. These are positives prospects but problems have arisen in export zones the Chinese firms operated in African countries. The incidents of hostility towards trade unions, poor

working conditions and unfair labour practices have been observed in African Special economic zones (Ahmed, 2017).

Another example is the different work attitudes between Pakistani Labour and Chinese labour culture. Chinese Labour gets 150% compensation rate for overtime of normal wage rate while Pakistani Labourer gets 200% normal wage compensation for overtime. Likewise, Pakistani labourer gets 14 days leave after only a year of service while Chinese workers in their own country get only 5 days leave in the first 10 years of service. So, these potential liberties to the labour class could come to an end should CPEC Special Economic Zones (Ahmed, 2017).

With these concessions on SEZ, there is a risk to the local manufacturing sector which is already uncompetitive and will be significantly damaged if the Chinese goods would enter the local market. The net jobs created might be less due to local businesses going bankrupt due to intense competition from Chinese businesses abroad and Chinese owned factories in the Special Economic Zones.

Environment will also deteriorate once coal power plants start functioning and spewing out dark smokes of pollution in the skies above Pakistan. More smog seen just like in Lahore in winter days will take over the country. This is all due to the coal fired power plants which is the dirtiest source of energy. Thus, it will change the lifestyle of Pakistanis forever for better or worst.

Conclusion

The CPEC is yet to start making apparent changes since it is still not completed. One thing that can be said with surety is that China has been working hard and it is due to the sweat and blood spent developing since their independence that they have earned the right to dominate the world in the coming years. CPEC is one of their ways to share their prosperity with the world. However, Pakistan needs to be weary of the potential problems that might arise in the aftermath. Another view that needs to be recognized is that Pakistan with over reliance on China will result into the dependency and might in the future require us to be subjugated to China.

Thus, to avoid such imbalance equation between these two countries, Pakistan needs to produce talented youth as per the requirements of the Chinese companies, otherwise dearth of local available skilled human resource will lead towards the employability

of Chinese workers in the market. Therefore, if Pakistan really wants to be benefited from the CPEC in terms of employment opportunities of Pakistani youth in Chinese companies then along with learning Chinese language, steps must be taken to enhance the applied and compound talents through intensive talent trainings in higher education institutions.

It is an established fact that economy is tightly linked with job opportunities and which is further linked with the highly educated, talented skilled work force. The question is, are Pakistani universities producing such relevant workforce? To accomplish this task, curriculum at higher education level and as well as at school level must be revised and designed as per market demanded skills, talented teachers with high professional standards to teach and inculcate these talents, 21st century's Assessment and evaluation criteria must be adopted rather than old classical way of examination system, economy driven subjects and new instructional material should be incorporated in the education system. To enhance the capacity of Pakistani students, more free of cost opportunities should be provided to conduct research and study in Chinese universities at higher education.

In a nutshell it can be summed up that instead of multiple prevailing conspiracies regarding CPEC, strategic and defensive cooperation of China and Pakistan will be moving forward in the coming years which transformed from All weather friendship to Iron Brotherhood marked under mutual trust and respect.

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